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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

THURSDAY, MARCH 29, 2007

In Today's Papers

US Senate Passes Draft on Dink and Turkey

All papers report on Wednesday the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee passed a draft that condemns the assassination of Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, asks Turkey to scrap the controversial article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, and encourages Turkey to establish diplomatic, political, and trade ties with Armenia. Papers note that in the bill, a direct reference to Armenian "genocide" was "softened" to read "legal action was launched against Dink under article 301 for calling the 1915 Armenian massacres 'genocide.'" It's unclear when the draft will be raised on the Senate floor for approval, say papers.

Erdogan Meets Talabani, Abbas, Haniyah in Riyadh

All papers report Prime Minister Erdogan and Iraqi President Jalal Talabani met in Riyadh on Wednesday on the sidelines of the Arab League summit talks in the Saudi capital. Iraq's Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari also joined the meeting in which regional matters, including Kirkuk, were discussed. "It was a very positive and constructive meeting. We agreed on resolving problems through dialogue. Mr. Erdogan and I can solve all problems by speaking with each other, there's no reason for tensions," Talabani was quoted as saying. Papers also report Talabani said, referring to the PKK, "Those who stand against Turkey stand against us."

On the other hand, Yeni Safak reports that at the summit talks, Erdogan also met with Palestine President Mahmoud Abbas. Prime Minister Ismail Haniyah also joined the meeting. Erdogan reportedly invited both Palestinian leaders to Turkey.

Paper Discloses Buyukanit Speech

Liberal Radikal carries on page one a speech delivered by Turkish General Staff (TGS) chief General Yasar Buyukanit on March 16 at the War Academy in Istanbul. The speech was not made public. In his speech Buyukanit said the Turkish military will continue to express concerns over the protection of Turkey's unitary structure and the

basic characteristics of the state. He said the Turkish military is a "constitutional institution," and it will do its job whenever necessary. "The Turkish military knows the Constitution and the laws as well as those who remind us of the regulations. We don't need such warnings," Buyukanit stressed. Buyukanit also said it must be accepted that the problems seen today actually stemmed from the "wrong solutions" applied in the past: "It's a fact that we have created today's situation in northern Iraq by supporting the 36th parallel in 1991. We cannot blame others for our own mistakes." Buyukanit claimed the release of the PKK members detained [in Europe] indicated that some "feeble measures" adopted in foreign countries against the terror organization actually aimed to "camouflage" support given to the PKK. He added, "PKK terrorism is an issue which must be evaluated separately from the developments in northern Iraq. The terrorist organization finds support there, and is being kept on hand with the hope that it can be used when the time comes." With regard to Cyprus, Buyukanit said the Annan Plan was "not a fair and lasting" one. "The plan had derogations which would please both sides in Cyprus. If it was accepted, all derogations could be scrapped with an application by any Greek Cypriot national to European courts, ripping from Turkish Cypriots all the rights they thought they had acquired," Buyukanit emphasized. On Afghanistan, Buyukanit said he had earlier objected to NATO demands to send additional troops. "Turkey is the most prestigious country in Afghanistan. For example, Alliance member troops fighting against terrorists in the Kandahar province wear Turkish flag armbands while on duty. We have notified Turkish Foreign Ministry of this, because if they do something inappropriate, the blame will be put on Turks," the TGS chief maintained.

UK Freezes Ties with Iran

Sabah, Milliyet, Cumhuriyet, Yeni Safak and others: British Foreign

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Secretary Margaret Beckett announced yesterday that Britain has

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suspended all diplomatic ties with Iran. Meanwhile, meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki in Riyadh yesterday, PM Erdogan requested information about the seized British sailors. Mottaki informed Erdogan about the sailors' whereabouts and said that they were safe. Sabah reports that British Prime Minister Tony Blair said that he had a phone conversation with PM Erdogan to discuss the British sailors and Erdogan is in touch with the Iranian government on the issue.

Editorial Commentary on Iran, Israel-Palestine

Fikret Bila commented in the mainstream daily Milliyet (3/29):

"Turkey is exerting diplomatic efforts towards Iran regarding the detained British sailors. The Turkish Foreign Ministry claims these efforts are out of humanitarian concerns, not a go-between mechanism. In fact, Iran has experience in managing crises like this. Their tactic is to wait until the very last phase of a crisis and then start to take steps toward a solution at the very last minute. This same tactic is being applied to the crisis with the Britain sailors. In the first stage, Iran pursued a harsh attitude and rejected British requests and insisted the sailors had entered Iranian territorial waters. When the crisis is reaching its peak, Iran announces that it will release a female sailor. Similarly, Iran has been presenting an inflexible stance in tensions with the US and the UK. Later, it moves to a softer policy line once its voice heard long enough in international public opinion. With this crisis management style, Iran is trying to make itself recognized as an important regional player."

Ergun Babahan observed in the mainstream daily Sabah (3/29): "As is apparent once again at the Arab League summit, there is no way to ensure peace in the Middle East unless the Israel-Palestine issue is fully resolved. Despite numerous efforts so far on an international scale, including the Madrid Conference and the Oslo Peace Process, the Palestine problem remains the same. The people of Palestine continue to live under a brutal Israeli supervision and to struggle with poverty. And Israel still cannot accept the terms of a plan to establish genuine peace with Palestine. Interestingly enough, the entire world is pressuring Hamas to recognize Israel while there is

no serious attempt to convince Israel to recognize a Palestine state with the 1967 borders. Another interesting concept is that both the US and Israel campaigned for free elections in Palestine and later denied to recognize the free will of Palestinian people. It should not be surprising in today's world since norms and attitudes are distorted. For instance, coming all the way from America to invade Iraq can be presented as an operation for freedom while resisting against an occupation is presented as terrorism. This is where we are in today's world. As for the Palestine issue, Arab nations have broken their silence and have started to take some concrete action. The peace plan presented by the Arab League in Riyadh was prepared with clear and precise language which calls for Palestine and Israel live together and to respect each other's existence. Even though the plan is realistically formulated, its implementation is still unlikely. There is no sign from Israel that it will give up the occupied lands as long as it enjoys full support from the US."

ATC - Gates Remarks

Sabah, Aksam: Speaking at the American-Turkish Council's (ATC) annual conference, US Defense Secretary Robert Gates was quoted as saying that 'Turkey is a very valuable ally from every angle. Despite the struggles US-Turkey relations have had in recent years, our military, economic, political and personal ties remain strong. Turkey provided the US access to Iraq and Afghanistan through one of its air bases, without that access operations in Iraq would be exceedingly more difficult and vastly more expensive. The situation on Turkey's border with Iraq's Kurdish region is of particular concern. Every Turkish citizen killed by the PKK is a setback for success in Iraq and a setback in our relationship with Turkey. Retired General Ralston was assigned as special envoy for countering the PKK, but we know that more needs to be done on this issue.'

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The Armenian Church on Akdamar Island will be Opened Today

Sabah, Milliyet, Bugun, Posta, Hurriyet and others: The inauguration of the newly renovated Akdamar Church in Van will take place today. Participating in the ceremony will be Turkish Culture Minister Atilla Koc, Armenian Deputy Culture Minister Gagik Gyurjyan, Turkish - Armenian Patriarch Mesrob II, representatives of the Armenian Diaspora and of foreign missions in Turkey. The US will be represented by US Embassy Deputy Chief of Mission Nancy McEldowney. Papers highlight that no cross will be placed on top of the Church despite requests from the Armenian community. Milliyet reports Turkish Foreign Ministry Spokesman Levent Bilman said that 'the request to place a cross on the top of the church was conveyed to the Foreign Ministry through the Culture Ministry and that the issue is under study.'

TV Highlights

NTV, 6.00 A.M.

Domestic News

- Mustafa Ozturk has been arrested in Erzurum in connection with the murder of Armenian journalist Hrant Dink. Ozturk, a key suspect in the killing, was earlier interrogated and released by the court.

- In a meeting with labor union representatives, CHP's Haluk Koc said Prime Minister Erdogan acts "like a sultan," and advised Erdogan to "read the constitution three times a day."

- Turkey's elite businessmen's grouping TUSIAD said there were signs of election-oriented economy, warning such moves would harm Turkey.

- Health Minister Recep Akdag said Turkey is to operate hospitals abroad, adding the first hospital will be opened in Sudan.

- Three PKK terrorists preparing for bomb attacks have been captured in Istanbul. Police have discovered seven shelters of PKK terrorists in the southeastern province of Batman.

International News

- Iranian Foreign Ministry said Tehran does not heed the

intermediation of third countries in the hostage sailors crisis with Britain.

- At least 50 people were killed and 120 wounded in three separate car bomb attacks in the northern Iraqi city of Talafar.
- EU has approved the opening of talks with Turkey on enterprise and industrial policy chapters, introducing, however, two benchmarks for completing the talks.
- Police carried out over 30 raids in four European countries, investigating alleged Mafia involvement in EU security and building contracts worth millions of euros.

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